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SCANS

WHAT WORK REQUIRES OF SCHOOLS

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A SCANS REPORT FOR AMERICA 2000

A LETTER TO PARENTS, EMPLOYERS, AND EDUCATORS

FROM THE SECRETARY OF LABOR AND THE SECRETARY'S COMMISSION ON ACHIEVING NECESSARY SKILLS

THE SECRETARY'S COMMISSION ON ACHIEVING NECESSARY SKILLS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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A LETTER TO PARENTS, EMPLOYERS, AND EDUCATORS

FROM THE SECRETARY OF LABOR AND THE SECRETARY'S COMMISSION ON ACHIEVING NECESSARY SKILLS

We, your Secretary of Labor and members of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), write as concerned representatives of the nation's schools, businesses, unions, and government. We have completed our initial examination of changes in the world of work and the implications of those changes for learning.

We understand that schools do more than simply prepare people to make a living. They prepare people to live full lives—to participate in their communities, to raise families, and to enjoy the leisure that is the fruit of their labor. A solid education is its own reward.

This report concerns only one part of that education, the part that involves how schools prepare young people for work. It does not deal with other, equally important, concerns that are also the proper responsibility of our educators. We do not want to be misinterpreted. We are not calling for a narrow work-focused education. Our future demands more.

For most of this century, as this nation took its goods and know-how to the world, America did not have to worry about competition from abroad. At home, the technology of mass production emphasized discipline to the assembly line. Today, the demands on business and workers are different. Firms must meet world class standards and so must workers. Employers seek adaptability and the ability to learn and work in teams.

This change has many implications. We focus on one: more than half of our young people leave school without the knowledge or foundation required to find and hold a good job. Unless all of us work to turn this situation around, these young people, and those who employ them, will pay a very high price. Low skills lead to low wages and low profits. Many of these youth will never be able to earn a decent living. And, in the long run, this will damage severely the quality of life everyone hopes to enjoy. None of us, and none of you, want to stand by while this happens.

The Commission spent 12 months talking to business owners, to public employers, to the people who manage employees daily, to union officials, and to workers on the line and at their desks. We have talked to them in their stores, shops, government offices, and manufacturing facilities. Their message to us was the same across the country and in every kind of job: good jobs depend on people who can put knowledge to work. New workers must be creative and responsible problem solvers and have the skills and attitudes on which employers can build. Traditional jobs are changing and new jobs are created everyday. High paying but unskilled jobs are disappearing. Employers and employees share the belief that all workplaces must "work smarter."

From these conversations, we have drawn three major conclusions:

All American high school students must develop a new set of competencies and foundation skills if they are to enjoy a productive, full, and satisfying life. Whether they go next to work, apprenticeship, the armed services, or college, all young Americans should leave high school with the know-how they need to make their way in the world. In this document, know-how has two parts: competence and a foundation of skills and personal qualities. Less than one-

half of our young people possess it. This know-how will be important to those who will be developing the World Class Standards for educational performance called for by President Bush in April 1991 when he announced a new education strategy, "AMERICA 2000."

The qualities of high performance that today characterize our most competitive companies must become the standard for the vast majority of our companies, large and small, local and global. By "high performance" we mean work settings relentlessly committed to excellence, product quality, and customer satisfaction. These goals are pursued by combining technology and people in new ways. Decisions must be made closer to the frontline and draw upon the abilities of workers to think creatively and solve problems. Above all, these goals depend on people—on managers committed to high performance and to the competence of their workforce and on responsible employees comfortable with technology and complex systems, skilled as members of teams, and with a passion for continuous learning.

The nation's schools must be transformed into high-performance organizations in their own right. Despite a decade of reform efforts, we can demonstrate little improvement in student achievement. We are failing to develop the full academic abilities of most students and utterly failing the majority of poor, disadvantaged, and minority youngsters. By transforming the nation's schools into high-performance organizations, we mean schools relentlessly committed to producing skilled graduates as the norm, not the exception. That, in fact, is the goal of President Bush's education strategy.

But, these convictions remain abstract issues unless you can understand them in the world of your child's education, your business needs, and

the standards of your school. This document lays out what these convictions mean in practice, on the job and in the school. Most important, it defines what you must do to protect the future of your child, your business, and the health of American education.

This report identifies five competencies, which, in conjunction with a three-part foundation of skills and personal qualities, lie at the heart of job performance today. (See insert page 5.) These eight areas represent essential preparation for all students, both those going directly to work and those planning further education. All eight must be an integral part of every young person's school life.

Seldom does one of these eight components stand alone in job performance. They are highly integrated, and most tasks require workers to draw on several of them simultaneously. Take an example far removed from the everyday world of work most of us experience: the men and women whose work involved planning and executing Operation Desert Storm had to apply all of the competencies to the problems before them. They did not categorize the problems encountered into five domains of competence and a three-part foundation. Instead, the officers solved problems by bringing their know-how to bear on the situation in the Middle East. The soldiers who executed the orders of the officers had to bring the same kinds of know-how to bear at their level.

On a different front, American manufacturing exports have surged since 1984, driven in part by radical improvements in quality, lower costs, and improved efficiency. Both of these situations demonstrate what hundreds of thousands of Americans can do with solid training. There is every reason to believe that similar success can be duplicated school-by-school, worker-by-worker, and manager-by-manager in the competitive environment that tests the United States today.

WORKPLACE KNOW-HOW

The know-how identified by SCANS is made up of five competencies and a three-part foundation of skills and personal qualities that are needed for solid job performance. These include:

COMPETENCIES —effective workers can productively use:

- **Resources**—allocating time, money, materials, space, and staff;
- **Interpersonal Skills**—working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating, and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- **Information**—acquiring and evaluating data, organizing and maintaining files, interpreting and communicating, and using computers to process information;
- **Systems**—understanding social, organizational, and technological systems, monitoring and correcting performance, and designing or improving systems;
- **Technology**—selecting equipment and tools, applying technology to specific tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting technologies.

THE FOUNDATION —competence requires:

- **Basic Skills**—reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking, and listening;
- **Thinking Skills**—thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind's eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning;
- **Personal Qualities**—individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity.

The SCANS skills defined in this document carry serious implications for parents, employers, and educators.

Parents must insist that their sons and daughters master this know-how and that their local schools teach it. Unless you do, your children are unlikely to earn a decent living. If your children cannot learn these skills by the time they leave high school, they face bleak prospects—dead-end work, interrupted only by periods of unemployment, with little chance to climb a career ladder.

Polls indicate that most Americans believe that schools, in general, need improvement. But they also believe the school their child attends is fine. Both conditions cannot be true at the same time. The larger national problem begins in each of our neighborhood schools.

You can do several things to improve American education. First, display the SCANS skills prominently in your home and discuss them, often, with your children. Make sure they understand what you expect. Second, take the list with you to your child's school and find out where and how the school is equipping your child with these skills. Organize a parents' meeting to discuss the SCANS findings and what your school is doing about them. Finally, make sure that your school superintendent and your school board know of your interest in these competencies and this foundation.

Employers must orient their business practices to hiring and developing this know-how in employees. If you do not develop a world class workforce, your business inevitably will be at risk. If, for example, only 60 percent of your employees have these skills, and 90 percent of Japanese and German workers possess them, you are wasting much more on rework, poor quality, and late deliveries than are your competitors.

Here is what you can do. First, reorganize your workplace into the high-performance environment of the future. Nine out of ten employers are operating on yesterday's workplace assumptions. Do not be one of them. Second, invest in your employees so that they can obtain the skills needed to succeed in this new environment. Third, tell educators clearly what you need and work with them to accomplish it. You know that students have to believe that you care about what they learn. Employers who value performance in high school when they make their hiring decisions provide students with the right signal: learning and earning are related activities.

Finally, use the materials the Department of Labor can provide to confirm that the SCANS skills accurately reflect your local workforce requirements. Having confirmed these skills, make sure your local school board never loses sight of them in its instructional planning. By doing so you will support the President of the United States in his efforts to put World Class Standards—incorporating the SCANS vision—into American schools and workplaces.

Educators have to instill in students the perspective on results that the SCANS skills demand. If you do not, you will be failing your students and your community as they try to adjust to the next century. You, more than anyone, are responsible for helping our children develop the skills they need.

Here is how you can help. First, tell your students what the standards are—what is expected of them. Second, give them the benefit of a fair and firm assessment of where they stand and what they need to do. If they pass from grade to grade and receive diplomas without mastering these skills, they cannot make their way in the world of work. Third, inject the competencies and the foundation we have defined into every

nook and cranny of the school curriculum. Your most gifted students need this know-how, and so do those experiencing the greatest difficulties in the classroom. We are convinced that if students are taught the know-how in the context of relevant problems, you will find them more attentive, more interested—indeed, more teachable—because they will find the coursework challenging and relevant. Finally, ask for the materials the Department of Labor can make available to you. Use them with your colleagues and the local business community to have your students confirm that the SCANS skills represent real work in your home town.

We know that some schools are already transforming themselves. They serve as the inspiration for President Bush's recent proposals to build "a New Generation of American Schools." We know, too, that many teachers are accomplishing wonders against formidable odds, and that most would do the same if given the opportunity. We hope to encourage these developments so that all schools, for every student, can be transformed.

Above all, we know that many students work very hard. But many more do not because they do not believe the lessons they are learning are connected to the real world or that the diplomas they are earning will bring them a brighter future.

This report addresses one obstacle that stands in the way of that future. Employers have never clearly told educators what students need to know and be able to do in order to succeed. Those requirements, as this Commission sees them, are described in the following pages.

This document is our opening statement about the future of your children, your business, and your school. It provides a general description of what is required. We have created this first statement with the advice of experts, educators, employees, supervisors, and business and labor

leaders from around the nation. Do not take our word for it. Our conclusions must be tested in your homes, schools, and places of business. Join us in this conversation and share your thoughts with us. Write, call, and visit the Department of Labor for more information and for the tools and materials that can help you test these ideas and propositions for yourself.

June 28, 1991

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Lynn Martin
Secretary of Labor

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Lauderdale County, Alabama

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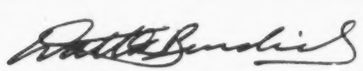

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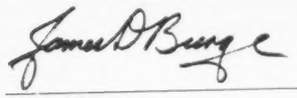
International Business Machines



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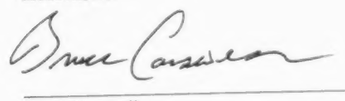
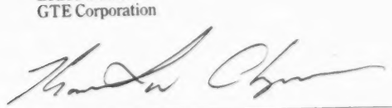
Motorola, Inc.



Bruce Carswell
GTE Corporation



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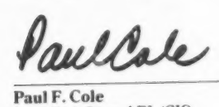
Greater Southeast Community Hospital



Paul F. Cole
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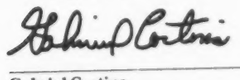
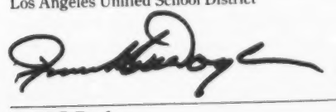
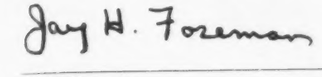
Gloria J. Conn
Wayne County Regional Educational
Service Agency



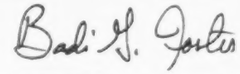
Gabriel Cortina
Los Angeles Unified School District



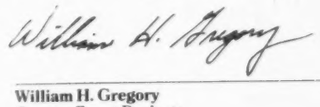
Frank P. Doyle
General Electric Company



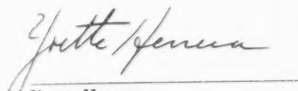
Jay H. Foreman
United Food and Commercial Workers



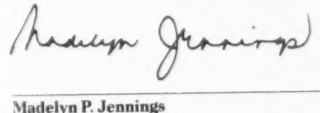
Badi G. Foster
Aetna Life and Casualty



William H. Gregory
Gregory Forest Products



Yvette Herrera
Communications Workers of America



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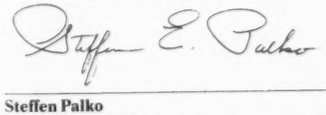
Gannett Company, Inc.



Steffen Palko
Cross Timber Oil Company

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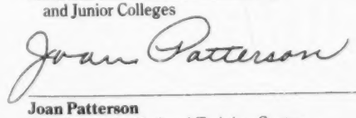
and Junior Colleges



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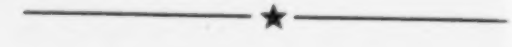

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